

PROVIDING FOR QUALITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Presentation of FEA President Maureen Dinnen for the House Education Appropriations Subcommittee

As you consider this year's education budget, we at the Florida Education Association think it is vital to point out that while one identified goal is the reduction of class sizes in Florida, there is a larger goal.

And that's the quality of the public school system. That quality system has 5 components:

- Smaller class sizes.
- Recruiting and retaining qualified teachers and staff
- A safe and secure school environment
- Adequate tools/Material and Technology
- Parental support

To be truly successful, Florida will have to pay attention to all these things.

FEA supports a 2003-04 K-12 operational budget that builds on the premise that every Florida public school must be high quality. The Class Size Reduction constitutional amendment is clearly an important element to achieve quality but adequate support for other core elements must also be recognized and adequately funded.

Clearly, the 2003-04 budget must support a goal to recruit and retain quality teachers and educational staff professionals.

The intent of class size reduction is to enhance student achievement; therefore, it is essential that sufficient funds be allocated to attract a quality workforce as we implement the amendment. Should funds not be allocated to meet that goal, the long term positive impact of class size reduction upon student achievement may not be realized. To that end, FEA presents our thoughts on the K-12 budget in a way designed to elevate Florida's funding commitment to a level comparable to the state's commitment for standards and accountability.

Specifics of our thoughts are outlined below.

On-going Commitments must be met.

- 50,900 new K-12 students will cost \$150.7 million for new teachers and support services.

- Cost-of-living increases related to equipment, supplies and other non-personnel issues would cost \$62.6 million.
- The cost of health insurance coverage that was paid by school boards increased \$175 million in 2002-03. We anticipate the increased cost for 2003-04 to be no less than \$175 million in 2003-04. Overall school boards spend over \$1 billion for employee health insurance coverage.
- Workload increases must be funded for transportation, instructional materials and the teachers lead program.

Elements of Quality must be funded.

- Funding the class size reduction amendment calls for over 7,800 new teachers in 2003-04. The cost for class size reduction proposed by the Governor is \$628 million. We urge you to allow district flexibility with the use of these funds when the class size reduction goal is met.
- Providing sufficient funds for meaningful salary increases for teachers and school support staff is critical to keeping our best personnel. This can best be accomplished by increasing the base student allocation to a level that will provide adequate salary funds. Then allow local school boards to address with their teachers and support staff the critical question of compensation and priorities for that local district.
- At a minimum, after insurance increases, teachers and school support staff need pay increases that match the cost of living. Currently, the average Florida teacher salary lags behind the national average by \$5224 and support staff salaries are also well below those of their national peers. The cost of a 1% pay increase for state teachers and support staff is just under \$100 million.
- Teacher training should be increased with emphasis for the training funds to be used in the implementation of Class Size Reduction.
- While National Board Certification is not a component within the FEP, the expansion of this program continues to increase the expertise and quality of our teaching corps. FEA requests an increase of \$28 million, the level requested by the Florida Board of Education.